



# Global Highlights

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## Technology and Innovation

### Are we heading towards an “Extreme Future”?

- In a recent book<sup>1</sup>, James Canton a consultant and “global futurist” claims that the World is entering a new era of revolutionary change, that will dramatically alter human lives and societies in the coming decades, in what he calls an “Extreme Future”.
- Even though the trends he identifies are well known (new sources of energy, ageing, globalization, climate change, etc.), his major departure from current trend scenarios lies in his emphasis in the interactions and synergies created by innovation in four fields: Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information Technology and Networks and Neurotechnology. He sees those innovations as mutually reinforcing each other in such a way that will dramatically change human life and society in the coming decades.
- One major change, according to Canton, will be a dramatic improvement in human life and physical well-being. He sees “longevity medicine” as the source not only of longer life-spans, but also at the heart of retardation of illness and even enhancement of human performance, shaping the “largest global marketplace”. What we are seeing today with the development of whole industries focused on beauty and sexual performance enhancements, is just a tiny preview of what it might come if new advances allow people to get access to procedures to manipulate the body, even at the molecular level, to achieve more intelligence, beauty and health for them or their children. Canton believes those advances are just around the corner.
- He is not alone in his optimism. In a recent article in [The Economist](#), this well respected news magazine claims that “It looks unlikely that medical science will abolish the process of ageing. But it no longer looks impossible”. This would be so, thanks to major advances in understanding the biological and physical aspects of ageing that allowed breaking that process in seven major components that might become manageable in a not so distant future.
- In what is probably the best chapter in his book, Canton depicts a future labor marketplace determined by the innovation readiness of the workforce, with companies, governments and countries competing for an increasingly scarce pool of talent. In a world driven by technological change and innovation, the ability to lead and adapt to change will become key levers for success for companies, unleashing a major race to find and retain people with these abilities. According to his own research, he identifies 5 major traits that define “future-ready skills” of potentially successful workers: a positive outlook on the future, family and community involvement, higher education, science and tech skills and financial awareness skills.
- One major challenge for the coming years is the retention of the “wisdom” of the Baby-Boom generation. He claims that companies must prepare in advance, designing “mentor programs to extract and pass along the knowledge of the boomers”. Failing to do so could entail major losses of critical knowledge, making a parallel with the Y2K scare, when there was a scramble to find old programmers who knew the “lost languages” of the initial stages of the IT revolution.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Extreme Future: The top trends that will reshape the World in the next 20 years”. Plume. September 2007.